

Healing or Grief and Loss Circles

Feelings of grief and loss can arise from many different circumstances. Students experience many losses, some of which are developmentally normal and some of which are not. For young people whose lives have been characterized by instability, any loss may trigger the pain of previous losses. When grief is not expressed and released in healthy ways, it often surfaces in disruptive behavior or acting out. Unresolved/unacknowledged grief can be an unconscious source of anxiety, anger, frustration, withdrawal, moodiness or aggression. Providing a safe space to process grief can prevent behaviors that harm self or others and can free the brain to focus on learning.

The following circle outlines are provided as basic forms that can be adapted to the circumstances of a specific situation of grief or loss. These are not intended to be prescriptive but to provide a starting point for creating a circle design that feels right to the facilitator.

In a grief circle it is important to:

- Begin with an intentional calming opening to set a tone of dignity, respect and thoughtfulness.
- Remind participants of values and guidelines as a positive foundation for the conversation.
- Invite expression of difficult emotions - sadness, grief, hurt, fear, anger, anxiety.
- Invite participants to identify healthy ways they have coped with loss in the past.
- Invite participants to recognize strengths, assets or sources of hope to anchor in as they move forward.
- Close the circle carefully, clearly marking the end of the circle space and honoring the work of the circle in processing the grief.

Healing or grief circle #1

Circle for whole class or group where an Individual in class/group has a specific loss, e.g. loss of pet, death of grandparent:

Opening: reading or several deep breaths or stretching

Check-in round: Tell us about one thing you saw on the way to school today.

Explain about the loss experienced by one of the class members if everyone is not already familiar with the situation.

Remind everyone of the classroom values and guidelines for circle or do a round about values and offer basic guidelines to the circle.

Round: When you heard about (*name of person*)'s loss (*identify the specific loss*) what did that remind you of from your own life?

Round: What do you think is the hardest thing about that kind of loss?

Round: Is there anything you would like to say to (*name of person*) to support him at this time?

Round: What helps you feel better when you are sad?

Check-out round: How are you feeling about this circle?

Closing: reading, breathing or stretching

Healing or grief circle #2

Circle for whole class/group where they have a shared loss or shared experience of distress, e.g. natural disaster, threats of violence:

Opening: reading or several deep breaths or stretching

Check-in round: Tell us how your mind and your heart are feeling today.

Remind everyone of the classroom values and guidelines for circle or do a round about values and offer basic guidelines to the circle.

Explain that we will talk in circle today about _____ (*name clearly the event or situation*)

Round: How did it feel in your body when _____ happened?

Round: How are you feeling now?

Round: What is most frightening about what happened?

Round: What is one thing or one person that has helped you feel better since this happened?

Round: What is one thing you can do to make someone else feel better about the situation?

Round: What gives you hope? Or Which one of our values helps you the most in this situation?

Check-out round: How are you feeling about this circle?

Closing: reading, breathing or stretching

Healing or grief circle #3

Circle for a group of students who have lost an adult or peer who was part of their community (death, illness, moving away . . .).

Opening: Reading or mindful breathing

Check-in round: Tell us about one good thing and one difficult thing that happened to you so far today.

Remind everyone of the classroom values and guidelines for circle or do a round about values and offer basic guidelines to the circle.

Explain that we will talk in circle today about _____ (*name*) who has been a part of our community but is no longer with us (or soon will be leaving us).

Round: Tell us how long you have known _____ (*name*) and tell us about the first time you met _____ (*name*).

Round: What is an important memory you have of _____ (*name*)?

Round: How will our community be different without _____ (*name*)?

Round: Is there anything you wish you had said to this person?

Round: Tell us about one thing you think _____ (*name*) was good at that inspires you to be like that. OR Tell us one thing you admire or appreciate about _____ (*name*) that inspires you to be like that.

Round: Is there anything else you would like to say about how it feels to know that _____ (*name*) will no longer be part of our community?

Round: What is one good thing you will do for yourself in the next week? Or How can we support each other through this difficult time?

Check-out round: How do you feel about our circle today?

Closing ceremony: reading, breathing or movement

Other possible questions in healing or grief circles:

- Where were you when you heard this news?
- What has been the most difficult part of _____ (*name the challenge or source of distress*) for you?
- How has this changed your life? Or How do you think this will change your life?
- What strength have you used to get through this?
- What gifts have you found in this experience?
- Who is a role model for you in making the best out of a bad situation?
- Are you grieving anything else you would like to speak to at this time?
- What can you do to offer compassion to yourself regarding your grief?
- What prior life experience did this situation bring up for you?